



Testimony of

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***SB 455 An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention***

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Shellye Davis and I have been a paraeducator in the Hartford Public Schools for 29 years. In that time, I have had the opportunity to observe the educators - teachers and paraeducators - who have come and gone (or come and stayed) in the system.

It is from this perspective that I would like to address a weakness in the proposed legislation, **SB 455 An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention**. That weakness is the failure to address the potential for advancement of paraeducators to the ranks of teachers. As you know, at present to become a teacher one needs a bachelor's degree which requires multiple education classes that are not specific to a discipline's curriculum. To become a paraeducator requires an Associate Degree. The law does not provide for any substitution of years of classroom experience in place of educational classes so that paraeducators can seek certification as teachers. Paraeducators are allowed to fill in as substitute teachers in the absence of a certified teacher because of that experience, but they are not in any way credited for their experience when seeking permanent certification.

I have seen many young teachers come into the Hartford Public Schools in fulfillment of requirements under programs that turn out largely unprepared teachers and have low retention rate. Many of these teachers know nothing of the community into which they have been placed and struggle to connect with the students who regard them as outsiders. These teachers have not made a long-term commitment to either the profession or the community. This impaired structure gets translated into impaired education. Meanwhile, paraeducators who have worked in our schools for long periods of time are presented with obstacles that keep them from entering the teaching profession. However, these same paraeducators have demonstrated the ability to communicate with the students, are known by the students as they move through the school from year to year, and overwhelmingly live in the school's community.

As AFT CT President Jan Hochadel mentions in her testimony, only seven percent of teachers in the state are minorities, while a much higher percentage of paraeducators are minorities. Providing a path for advancement of paraeducators to teachers by recognizing years of experience as the equivalence of formal study would accomplish several goals: first, it would reduce the teacher shortage; second, it would increase the ranks of minorities among Connecticut's teachers' and third, it would create a pathway for younger people to become paraeducators.

Therefore, I would like to propose that the bill be amended to include in new Section 1 the following provision:

(9) adopt individualized programs for paraeducators with no less than seven years of experience that recognize demonstrations of competency for certification as teachers and for the evaluation of such applications by the Department of Education.

I note that students themselves are keen observers. When they observe the advancement of paraeducators who have worked with them for several years to the ranks of teachers, they will reason that with hard work they themselves can advance and need not remain in one position for life. Such a pathway provides hope, then, not just for the paraeducators, but for the students who have come to know them.

Thank you.